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THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION OF IMPERIAL SIGNS AND IMAGES IN THE LITERARY WORK OF ISMAIL KADARE

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The literary work of Ismail Kadare is overloaded with signs, images and what this essay terms "imperial figures." Imperial figures in our usage of the signs of empires marked upon the past, often continue to resonate in the present. Kadare's poetry, and even more his prose, overwhelms the reader with structures, symbols, details and imperial subjects. In their entirety, these signs of historical, ideological and cultural character originate from various Roman, Ottoman, fascist and communist sources, and deliberately intrigue reading from the socio-political aspect, which is oriented through allusive, confrontational and propositional mechanisms. Our study analyses the literary functions of imperial signs and images in some of the author's novels. By assuming that the implication of imperial images and signs in Kadare's books is a characteristic of his style, we also aim to explore, through the investigation of specific examples, the essence of literary intent and perceptual projection which stems from their frequent use. The paper shows that Kadare draws deeply from culture-embedded values, invoking the reader's desire to make meaning or interpret signs and images in order to associate his fictionalized imperial signs with his depiction of Albania's history.

Key words: Ismail Kadare, sign, trace, symbol, prose

INTRODUCTION

Ismail Kadare, one of the most prominent writers in Albanian literature, as well as one of the most internationally recognized and awarded, produced a large body of literature during the fifty years of the communist system. In this time his writing moved away from the official method – socialist

realism – the solely accepted method for art and literature under the dictatorship. In his literary work, he created another Albania, a fictional one, utterly different from that depicted in the socialist-realist literature, which focused routinely on contemporary themes such as socialist heroes, class struggle, and the like.

In Kadare's fictional homeland, the boundaries between countries, times, and the living and the dead, are not well-defined. They become misty and enable connections and links between historical moments by merging the present with the past, geographical, linguistic, or cultural.

Thus in his prose, quite distinctive from that of his contemporaries, one can find the historical past in the present and the present in the past, and likewise one observes what is native and known, as well as the self, as much as the alien, the unknown, and the other. His status as an internationally recognized author might be seen to grant Kadare a sort of privilege apart from other writers, and his novelties often influenced the national literature of the time.

Because of its tight bonds with the past, as with the wider Albanian history, Kadare's fiction bears traces left by the great empires. His work, particularly his prose, builds upon images that transcend the present. By delving into Albanian history, as well as into the history of humankind, it produces a sensation of timelessness. What is more, his prose carries the traces of a closed, isolated Albania, from the fifty-year experience under communism or the five-hundred years under the Ottoman rule, as well as the fascist and the Nazi, the Russian and Chinese empires, which, although far removed in space and interests, became part of this small country's history.

The aim of this paper is to look into Kadare's fiction in order to identify the imperial signs and images, the cultural *traces* left from the great empires throughout history that appear and take on resonate and combinatory meanings in his fiction. Our intention is to interpret the role of these signs in his narrative. For this purpose, we will focus on the following novels and novellas, *Emblem of the Past/Emblema e dikurshme*, 1977, *The Concert* (English trans. 1994)/*Koncert në fund të dimrit*, 1988, *Chronicle in the Stone* (English trans. 1987)/*Kronikë në gur*, 1971 and *The Monster/Përbindëshi*, 1965, which we think offer more interpretative potential for the imperial signs and images.

Our reading of Kadare's fiction follows Ricoeur's approach in *Time and Narrative III*, in which Ricoeur views history and literature as instruments from reconfiguring-figuring time, and refers to the traces as signs of a past, or of an accomplished journey, or of a time bygone (Ricoeur 1990: 183). In

Kadare's fictional narrative, such historical traces left on a small country by great empires throughout its history, are seen to transform into signs and symbols, even though in their foremost function they were not created to communicate as such. Such is the transformative force of Kadare's work.

In Kadare's writing, we can speak of two ways of functioning of these imperial images and signs in the narrative: first, as traces and, secondly, as symbols. Imperial figures proliferate as signs of empires marked upon the past, that often continue to resonate in the present. Mere traces, in Ricoeur's sense, can be found in works like *Emblem of the Past*, *The Concert* and *Chronicle in Stone*. On the otherhand, a more fully symbolic narrative, whose symbols detach the process of reading from the real time-space in order to transport it to a rather unreal time, is present in the novels such as *The Monster*, *The Palace of Dreams* (English trans. 1990)/*Nëpunësi i pallatit të* ëndrrave, 1981, etc.

HERALDIC MARKS AND SIGNS

In the novella *Emblem of the Past*, the whole text builds around the decoding of the aforementioned traces and their interpretation. The setting is an Albanian village where an oil prospecting geological expedition[1] accidentally discovers a crime committed thirty years earlier in a thirteenth-century parish church. On a dark stormy night, the churchwarden is murdered, and a bas-relief, an emblem of the Muzakas – one of the aristocratic Albanian families in the Middle Ages – is damaged and torn off. The novel's narrative is interwoven with this intriguing event, which, after arousing one of the geologists' interest, gains importance and connects a contemporary oil prospecting expedition with the parish murderer thirty years back.

The bas-relief is the mark that solves the mystery of the murder, and along with that, adds significance to the text. This image stems from the realm of heraldry – a historical-cultural phenomenon that emerged and further materialised from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onward (Varfi 2000: 9). Through its symbols and colours, heraldry not only carries the identity and social rank of a family or clan, but, especially when viewed from the present, it also bears the historical, artistic and moral identity of a certain

[1] Meanwhile, the world seethes with news items of the oil crisis and the risk of a war between Arabian countries and Israel.

time (Varfi 2000: 10). In their role as assistants to history, heraldic symbols serve the function of marks.[2] The mutilated bas-relief is the cause of a crime. The narrative is dedicated to solving the mystery concerning the symbols in the emblem, which the churchwarden's murderers, *the black hoods*, destroyed on the night of the murder. The geologist is unable to comprehend why those he calls *the black hoods*, who had introduced themselves as folklore researchers, have destroyed the emblem, or what they have concealed.

The mystery is only solved after the information that the Muzakas had two emblems comes to light. The known one was comprised of a crowned double-headed eagle with spread wings. On top was a triangular sky-blue shield[3] with a six-pointed star (Varfi 2000: 50). The other emblem, however, is sky-blue, with a silvery spring streaming down on either side.

John Muzaka depicts the symbols of this insignia as follows:

> […] since ancient times, the emblem of our family has been a lively spring that flowed down to the ground in two streams on either side, and this was the source of Epirus, about which many authors have written, the one of which extinguishes a torch, whereas the other lights the extinguished one. (qtd. in Varfi 2000: 49, trans. ours)

As shown in the above description, this spring flows from its source (the earth) in two streams. It can, on the one hand, extinguish the fire (obviously suggesting water), and on the other, it can light it (petrol). That is the missing part from the mutilated emblem in the text, and the need to conceal this

[2] According to J. E. Cirlot, heraldic symbols are the outward components of heraldry (crowns, helmets, mantles, lambrequins, supporters, chains), such as the inner elements (or arms: colours, metals, furs, parties, noble quarterings, figures). Apart from their literal or anecdotal sense, they have a symbolic significance, according to Cadet de Gassicourt and the Baron du Roure de Paulin, in *L'Hermétisme et l'art héraldique* (Paris, 1907). (Piobb supports their opinion in his review of the book in *L'Année occultiste et psychique*, 1907.) Metals and colours may be "read" in terms of their own particular symbolism; parties and noble quarterings by spatial and graphic symbolism, as well as by their implicit "correspondences". Heraldic art recognizes five colours or enamels and two metals: gold (the Sun), silver (the Moon), gules (red—Mars), *sinople* (green—Venus), azure (Jupiter), purple (Mercury) and sable (Saturn). The symbolic meanings of colours, metals and parties are considered as products of the active (or spiritual) principle of the shield-of-arms working upon the passive, quaternary material symbolized by the surface of the shield. City coats-of-arms may be explained along similar lines, according to Gérard de Sède who, in *Les Templiers sont parmi nous* (Paris, 1962), suggests that the ship in the shield of the City of Paris may derive from the myth of the Argonauts, the quest for the Golden Fleece and the alchemical Work.

[3] The shield is both a part of a warrior's armour as well as the main part of a feudal family's emblem consisting of a field and various figures on it.

truth was the reason that the emblem was destroyed and the murder was committed in the parish church.

The image, in the case of the novella *Emblem of the Past*, is a trace of an epoch and of a family such as the Muzakas, well known among the Albanian aristocracy prior to the Ottoman occupation. As Kadare puts it in the novella, "Before the arrival of the Turks, Albania abounded with banners, insignias, castles, knights, barons, dukes, counts and chieftains, all of which had their own emblems and seals, with symbols of all sorts" (Kadare 1981: 231, trans. ours). The emblem is the mark of a time and culture when Albania was not politically and culturally detached from the European continent, and Kadare views it as culturally dominant in Albanian identity. The trace, in this case, the Muzakas' emblem, acquires an interpretative value and is considered a sign because it is seen as a fossil, or an artefact. Only as such does it represent the context of the time it comes from, of the social and cultural environment of a missing world. On the other hand, the emblem as a whole is not the only sign in the novel, but in particular other meanings are occluded in its mutilation and its severed and hidden part, which is the spring flowing on either side. The symbolism of this sign, the spring, which suggests the simultaneous existence at the same place of the water that extinguishes the fire and the petroleum that lights it, brings the meaning to a different level, connecting it with the issue of the *black hoods*—the foreign expedition—who are the underlying cause of the destruction of the bas-relief. Namely, one day, while Albania was under the Nazi occupation, a seeming folklore expedition – conducted by people whom nobody knew – arrived, committed mutilation and murder, obtained an alibi, and left unnoticed. The hoods on their heads protected them from winter rain which can be seen as the perfect cover for their identity, and in fact the writer does not seek to discover this identity either.

The trace, which is of physical constituency and reveals that something has occurred, simultaneously designates: the existence of the bas-relief and of a culture reaching the present from the Middle Ages; the missing part of the bas-relief as the reason for the committing of the crime; and the subsequent explanation of that reason, which was to conceal information concerning the oil sources.

In the novella, the trace, as Ricoeur says, has the effect of a sign (Ricoeur 1990: 183–184) that reintroduces into the text the simultaneity of past and history, all the while preserving its concreteness, concretely grounding the narrative, and causing new contemporary meanings and resonances to emerge from historical traces. The ambiguous sense of imperial signs

in Kadare's writing echoes this ambiguity, changing imperial traces from a sign of history, into a figure within the text that marks the continuity of temporal change, and of generations flowing and mutating, in order to show how the progression of history incorporates the past.

THE TOWN AND CHILDHOOD MEMORIES AS TRACES

The historical traces do not loose their concreteness in *Chronicle in Stone* either, which relates the life of a town—in fact the author's hometown—through a child's eyes and voice. The narrative is as fresh and concrete as the child from whose point of view the events are seen, preserving the child's purity and innocence, and describing the world as if it were seen for the first time.

The events are set in the context of World War II, at Europe's periphery, in a small town that appears as if it has woken from a dream and is of no interest to anyone, and where the citizens are rather detached from time. Italian, Greek, or German soldiers wander about the town, each leaving their mark on it, one by contributing to opening a brothel, another by the unfortunates who he kills. In this small isolated world, however, the child narrator builds his image of the world's empires and countries through some signs pressed on postage stamps:

> Here, take France and Canada, and give me Luxembourg.
> No way! … If you give me Abyssinia for two Polands, then we might do something.
> I will not give Abyssinia. Have France and Canada …
> Well, then I won't give you Germany I promised yesterday. I would rather tear it in four pieces than give it to you.
> We had been arguing and trading postage stamps even in the middle of the street for a whole hour. We were still arguing when Javier passed by and said to us laughing:
> Hey, are you making a re-division of the world? (Kadare 2000: 23, trans. ours)

Consistent with Kadare's method, the postage stamps in the hands of these young philatelists in that world that seems detached from time are traces, signifying that even in a weird little town, unimportant compared with the big countries and empires that the traces record, these children are inhabitants of the same planet. The times to come will prove what the

narrative foretells, that even this small apparently minor town is not to remain for long detached from the apocalypse that will sweep the world.

The stone-built town of the novel is also a sign and a trace caught up in time. The very title *Chronicle in Stone* leads the reader towards this image. The steep stone pavements, the stone-walled and stone-roofed houses, as everything and everyone else in the town, are part of the chronicle. Their eyes will witness and their backs will bear the tempests of time. It represents a sort of a witness-text of past time, as well as of historical and personal events.

However, in the case of the stone-built town, Gjirokastra, the relation between image and word is very distinctive. The chronicles have been marked in both stone and words. The stone image of the town has two lives: inside the text and outside of it. Inside the text, the image of the town has changed into a chronicle of important historical events, even though this chronicle is seen by a child's eyes and related in a child's voice. At the same time, the novel itself has marked the town, itself constituting a powerful image for whoever comes to visit Gjirokastra, which is now not just the uncommon town in the south of Albania, but the town of the *chronicle in stone*. The image has thus materialised in the world, transformed in fiction, and then been returned once again to the world where it was born. Now, however, in addition to the personal experiences and viewpoints, it has taken with it the world with which it was shaped in the fictional text.

Thanks to such marks and signs, the chronicle of the stone-built town is, more than the chronicle of a small town, rather remote from the great world; it is at the same time a chronicle of the world and what is happening with it. As will be discussed anon, in other novels Kadare uses symbols such as the Pyramid, Eagle, Palace of Dreams, etc. These symbols render these narratives far from that of the realistic novel. In *Chronicle in Stone*, however, every image is more concrete. Signs and images do not loose their concreteness or their realistic effect. The concreteness of these marks in the novel makes the reading more comprehensible and keeps the realistic narrative infused with historical and cultural elements.

TRACES OF THE CHINESE EMPIRE IN *THE CONCERT*

In the novel *The Concert*, imperial traces and signs begin to lose their concreteness and gain not only a rather more fluid appearance but also a symbolic role.

In this novel, Kadare follows the same line that he initiates in *The Great Winter (Dimri i madh*, 1977). While *The Great Winter* relates the events of the period of the breach with the Soviet Union, *The Concert* relates the breaking of relations with China. Those who lived through these times are well aware of the importance of these events in the fifty-year history of communism. They mark the total isolation of Albania not only from the West but also from the communist camp. Kadare dedicates most of the narrative to Mao Zedong, the internal and external intrigues in the Chinese Political Bureau and the reflection of that atmosphere in Tirana and Beijing.

Taking a view of the world's sky at the end of that October, Kadare relates how amidst all the satellites, meteorites, airplanes and birds, there journeyed a seemingly unimportant "letter of a small country addressed to a big country" (Kadare 1990: 25). The big country, China, beyond all comparison in power and with a thousand years of imperial history, is being challenged by a small country on the European continent. The antonymic pair big/small is to be found in many of Kadare's works. We previously saw it in *Chronicle in Stone*, where a small Albanian town looks like a small world in the great arena of the world war. Through this juxtaposition, all that Kadare says transcends time and space, as well as the boundaries of a closed isolated country and gains a more universal significance.

In the course of the narrative on the freezing of relations, certain traces start to materialise in the novel's characters' consciousness, as marks revealing the complex relationship between China and Albania, the former's position as a superpower that is seeking to influence zones in the European continent to mark there its presence, influence and power. These traces in the novel consist of the characters' memories of the time when the relations between the two courtiers strengthened, after the break with the Soviet Union.

"Do you want to comprehend China? Go to Beijing's theatre... Yes, it is full of horrible symbols: monkeys, serpents..." (Kadare 1990: 21, trans. ours). This insinuation concerning the role of the Beijing theatre gains power while depicting the state concert held in that theatre at the end of the novel, and comprises another indication of the importance that the theatrical signs and symbols hold in Chinese political life. Strong messages are conveyed in the concert through the colours, or the dragons and storks, about the life and death of Chairman Mao or of some other Plenium member, about his successor, some scheme being cooked up, and similar topics.

Through the depiction of cultural elements, Kadare aims towards a specific approach to the political atmosphere, yet, on the other hand, all

that he says about China can as well relate to the Albanian reality, where every gesture, move, action or refraining from acting of the high political class is interpreted as an alarm bell by the panic-stricken minds of the general population:

> Ah, yes, it was something he had heard years before from the mouth of Besnik Struga. It had to do with some serpents which, as one dreams of prior to a misfortune, he had seen in the swamp of Butrinti a little before breaking with the Soviets... And Besnik Struga had told Silva how on a festive evening ... while everyone was waiting to see the display of the fireworks just arrived from China ... he happened to be in the street precisely when they lit the sky. ... at last the fireworks appeared, like the mythical Chinese serpents... The people started shouting, "Serpents! Serpents!" and I thought with a trembling heart: What is this ominous thing? Serpents again! (Kadare 1990: 22, trans. ours)

The serpents in the sky, the monkeys and dragons in the Beijing theatre, are all signs of a different culture, of an empire like the Chinese, in which the dragon has become a sign of imperial power through countless dynasties, and where in some of which, such as the Manchu dynasty, its image appears as crowned and holy. The figures of dragons were not only used to ornament clothing but also on the first national flag. The serpent, on the other hand, also used to be an important motif in Chinese myth, where it appeared as half-animal, half-human. According to Cirlot, the worm, the serpent, the crocodile, each in its own way, are closely connected to the concept of the dragon. This is obvious in their image of the dragon, as similar to the snake but with four limbs (1971: 85–86).

However, the marks of Chinese imperial power in the novel do not solely read as merely signs of its power, but rather as a threat, a hazard, and as a reckoning concerning the likelihood of being betrayed or used to achieve some hidden ends. What is positive of one culture is not necessarily of another. The difference between Chinese imperial culture and that of a small European-based country is as great as the physical distance between them. In the characters' eyes, the serpents and dragons are full of negative connotations. Since the beginning of Christianity, the image of the serpent or the dragon has been diabolic,[4] which is why the character states that the serpents in a dream are a sign of evil that is going to occur. The sure symbol of imperial

[4] The Genesis and the Apocalypse contain the images and concepts of the snake (the covered Satan) or the dragon (the beast) with seven heads and crowns, as images or signs of Doomsday.

power in Chinese culture turns into a sign of ill-wish and evil ends. After all, isn't so often the power of the great a self-sufficient sign for feeling menaced if you are a small part of the world? Imperial signs, so glorious, continually trouble Albania's situation, threatening and promising catastrophe.

In Kadare's novels, one feels this atmosphere that has accompanied his country throughout its age-old history. Being in a key position as a bridge between the East and West, it has been traversed by the armies of many of the world's great empires. It is a small country that has often dared to challenge great ones: all sorts of empires, such as the Roman, Ottoman, Fascist, Nazi, Soviet and Chinese. These empires have all left their traces and retreated because, as Kadare puts it, a small country that addresses a letter to a big country, and sets off across the lonely darkness of the sky, expresses its belief in its ability to face the ensuing consequences.

Although traces and signs such as emblems, dragons, serpents, the stone-built town, memories, or postage stamps with images of the world's capital cities are traces of a circumstance, a particular culture, or a historical event, Kadare deals with them as literary figures by loading them with additional meanings. Even though at first sight the emblem is a verbal and visual sign, Kadare's treatment strips it of its arbitrariness by adding a motivation concerning its barbarous destruction and mutilation. The same happens with the firework serpents of light or the dragons of the Beijing theatre. Everything changes from *a trace* to a figure, without undoing the trace's concreteness.

Beyond the arbitrary bond they have as signs of a culture, in the novel they mark the stealthy and cunning goals of a big country towards a small one. Through the use of imperial signs and images, Kadare intends to show precisely this awareness of being small but at the same time being capable of facing the big ones. Just as the small can contest the powerful, so too do Kadare's novels remake the meaning of imperial signs, showing how temporal progress is also resistance. Theirs is a two-fold reading, both as traces bearing a sort of concreteness and figures (symbols) within the fictional narrative. Yet, it is important to show how in these texts they do not incite a symbolic reading.

SYMBOLIC SIGNS AND SYMBOLIC READING

The symbol and the symbolic narrative is characteristic of other of Kadare's novels, such as *The Monster*, *The Palace of Dreams*, *The Eagle* (*Shkaba*,

1995) and *The Pyramid* (English trans. 1996) (*Piramida*, 1992). As a key stylistic device, Kadare begets proliferating known and unknown symbols, originating from mythology, history, literature, politics, or architecture with a great synthesising power (Kucuku 2005: 32).

Kadare's figurative language is certainly highly sophisticated, and in discussing his prose one can speak of multi-layer figures, symbols, allegories, myths, and archetypes, which makes it an inexhaustible search. In this series of figures, we will focus only on those symbols that reveal an imperial presence. As it will be argued, their function is different from the previously discussed *trace-signs*.

In his novel *The Monster*, Kadare reintroduces the image of the wooden horse that the Greeks "gifted" the Trojans with. The image is presented on the very first page:

> A few kilometres from the town, on the open plain in the outskirts, was an abandoned big van. Its metal parts had been removed long since and now all that had remained of it was its closed wooden carriage. That had been attached to and stood on four thick beams planted in the ground. (Kadare 1991: 3, trans. ours)

The reader sees this image at the outset; further on the narrative introduces a young woman called Lena (He-Lena) who runs away from her fiancé, with whom she is not happy, for another boy, and the fable is displaced to a context with mythical references: one is reminded of Helen, her own elopement, the Horse and Troy. By splitting the imperial sign, the narrative is now doubled, in the present and in the mythical past. Kadare builds his symbol by firstly creating a realistic context, in which certain associations happen to appear, such as wooden van – wooden horse, Lena – He-Lena, fiancé – husband, nameless town – Troy.

The image presented at the beginning of the novel changes too:

> A few kilometres from the town, on the open plain, rose the big Wooden Horse... First appeared the head slightly turned aside, towards the town, then the neck, the back and at last, the belly and legs... people thought it had come rather too close to the town... In fact, the horse had never moved... (Kadare 1991: 5, trans. ours)

In the case of *The Monster*, the images that turn to symbols are markers of an inherited consciousness of humankind and of the European civilisation that mythically starts with the ruining of Troy—an event that for the writer resounds at all times, including the present. Like the symbol itself,

the monster too – the wooden horse – can be "read" or interpreted in two rational ways. As Eco states, unlike allegory, in which the meaning is obligatory, it is not so in the symbol. The symbol is interpreted and reinterpreted at subconscious levels; it enables the connection of opposites, and marks more than one thing simultaneously, since its contents transcend reason (Eco 1993: 142). The Illiad's wooden horse now comes as an image reflected onto modern times. Although it is now a wooden van, much the same as in the ancient times, inside its belly it conceals deceit, evasion, the apocalypse of a city and civilisation. As long as there is love, there will be betrayal; as long as there are cities, there will be foes that join together and bring as a "gift" the wooden horse, in whose belly hides the end and death.

The symbol is just as opaque in *The Palace* of *Dreams* and *The Blinding Order* (*Qorrfermani*, 1991). Only that the seemingly misty symbol there is "assisted" by an allegorical narrative that, by "necessitating" a predetermined meaning, helps the semantic mist dissolve. This dualism, both symbol and allegory, increases the ambiguity of the texts which, written during the communist period, through the symbols *Palace* and *Order*, appear to mark the Ottoman Empire, but indirectly imply the communist empire alongside with all totalitarian social systems. *The Eagle* and *The Pyramid* function along the same lines.

One could go on talking incessantly about the symbols, allegories, archetypes, or the marks and images that bear symbolic value in Kadare's works. By marking the numerous empires that left their trace on Albania, or the ideological and totalitarian empires (Communist), Kadare builds an *Ismailand* (Mandala 2016: 32), where fictional creatures now roam history, now myth, as much in the small homeland and totalitarian state as in the great world and in the dream of finding the *u-topos*.

In this way, Kadare's use of imperial signs speaks deeply of the condition of life under a totalitarian political regime. In such novels, the pyramid of Cheops brings to mind the pyramid of the dictator, the monster invokes the fear of treason and of being undone, the dream palace is suggestive of the communist party, its intrigues for power, and its spying. The writer there strives to utter his word without being hindered, the person tries not to be deprived of their freedom and the right to live and write; the world's images and the signs comprise the ideal code through which the writer intends to speak forth his truth and make up his lie all at once – a paradox conceivable for anyone who has lived and written under a dictatorship.

CONCLUSIONS

Ismail Kadare's prose contains clearly noticeable historical and cultural traces of the past, when Albania was part of the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, fascist, and communist empires. The author uses such traces as textual figures in his works. They are at times objects or images, such as emblems or insignias, flags and banners, eagles, or dragons, which bear a content that resounds in the present too; at other times, they assume the appearance of mythical figures, like the wooden horse, the pyramid, or the dream palace, functioning as symbols and necessitating another kind of reading, drawing the reader away from the realistic approach, and thus making the author's speech more ambiguous, more modern and more universal.

In the present discussion of Kadare's prose, we argue that imperial images and traces can be seen as possessing a double function: as both marks and symbols. Being keen on the historical past, Kadare readily treats it, and catches such traces not as a historian but as a writer. The traces are indications of a time and of one or more cultures. Their significance is not only historical but also spiritual, witnessing either the continuum of an inherited culture or the dignified defiance of the powerful by the powerless, of the great by the small. On the other hand, the marks from great cultures and the powerful empires seem to have become a part of the consciousness and transformed into powerful symbols and archetypes. In Kadare's fiction, such symbols convey meanings that do not refer to the past but to the present and the future. Through his prose written under dictatorship, Kadare employs such a means of expression in order to voice uncensored truths, which would have otherwise been almost impossible.

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